

Muslims in Contemporary Russia

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There are several reasons for the increasing role of Muslims in contemporary Russia, but those who study the area might conclude that a major, if not the major reason is their growing numbers. It is well known that Russia's population has decreased, but the decline has mostly affected ethnic Russians. Ethnic minorities in the Russian Federation who have historically professed Islam have experienced high birthrates, and consequently, the increasing interest of Muslims in the Federation. But this growth can hardly explain the growing Muslim population and, especially, their conflict with ethnic Russians, historically Orthodox. The source of the rising numbers of Russian Muslims—of various ethnic groups—is the dramatic decline of the global role of Russians, in fact, of the entire Slavic civilization as it has been constructed geopolitically and culturally for centuries.

To start with, the increasing number of people whose parents or grandparents were Muslim does not in itself create political/ethnic problems. The fact that certain ethnic groups in the former USSR were Muslim in the past does not necessitate that these people should be Muslims in the present, or that they should use their particular cultures and languages to emphasize their differences from the majority so as to create problems for the majority and the state in general. These people could well have been assimilated, as was done in the Soviet period, when most people—including those historically Muslim—had no religious affiliation and their Soviet passports retained the clause “nationality-ethnicity.”

Indeed, the historically Muslim minorities of the USSR followed the same road as other minorities. Many ethnic minorities were almost totally assimilated. They had no knowledge or interest in their native language/ culture, and they often downplayed their differences from Russians. This was not the result of an intentional assimilation policy of the authorities,

despite the assertions of nationalist-minded intellectuals from these minorities as well as quite a few Western pundits.

It is true that Soviet authorities inhibited the spread of religion; whereas they were comparatively tolerant of Orthodoxy, especially in the last years of the Soviet regime, they had much more negative views toward other religions. The prime targets were not Muslims but Jews and various Protestant sects, mostly because of the implicit connection between them and the USA, the major political rival of the USSR. Judaism also created an additional problem, for it stimulated Russian Jews' nationalism and desire for emigration to Israel. In contrast to the tsarists, the Soviet authorities did not directly punish or suppress studying or speaking one's native non-Russian language; at least the exceptions were quite rare. This was also the case with most non-Russian cultures/histories.

Of course, there was censorship, along with subjects that were not studied at all or only from a particular angle approved by the authorities. But the same problems existed for Russians and Russian culture during the Soviet period; in fact, no intellectual/cultural pursuit in the USSR could avoid the supervision and direct/ indirect restraints of the Party/authorities. Thus, the restraints on the study of the historical/ cultural traditions of the minorities of the USSR, including those who traditionally had been Muslims, did not mean serious pressure that would preclude them from studying their native culture/language. Moreover, the Soviet state, with its dominant Russian culture, actually promoted minorities' languages and cultures and often supported the native elite to prevent assimilation. In some non-Russian republics, local authorities forced high school students to take courses in non-Russian languages/culture even when neither the students nor their parents had any desire to do so.

The decline of interest in the culture and language of minorities, including those who were traditionally Muslim, could not therefore be attributed to the direct pressure of the central government. The lack of interest in studying non-Russian languages/cultures was also not entirely due to assimilation caused by the fact that Russian was the lingua franca of the state. The deeper reason had to do with the relationship between culture/language and power.

Such problems of the relations between power and culture have been explored by French postmodernists and later by their American followers for a long time. The proponents of the theory usually asserted that those who control “discourse”—ideology/culture—control power. But the opposite is true: it is those who control power, or, in a broad sense, civilizations, and are viewed as being mighty, who usually attract interest. The culture/language of these civilizations is seen as attractive and eagerly imitated. There is also a strong desire to be assimilated by these civilizations. This explains why ethnic minorities of the former USSR, including those who were historically Muslim, not only demonstrated a lack of interest in Islam—this, indeed, was discouraged, as was any religion—but also assimilated at a rapid pace. They quickly transformed themselves into basically Russian-speaking/Russian-by-culture individuals.

The Soviet Union, regardless of philosophical/political explanations of the regime, was the direct descendant of the Russian empire and thus was the empire of ethnic Russians par excellence. It was a dynamic global state with enormous prestige, and was projected to be so in the future even at the time of Brezhnev’s stagnation. The USSR/Russia was a part of the great Slavic commonwealth. Russian civilization had what was called the Russian idea—the sense of a global mission and destiny to create an ideal society. In its cosmological interpretation, the “Russian idea” implied Russia’s leading role in spreading humanity in the cosmos.

These grand schemes implied a certain image of ideal Russian men and women as highly spiritualized, heroic people who lived for high goals and were ready for sacrifice. All these aspects of Russian civilization had disappeared by the time of the collapse of the USSR. By 1991, Russia had become a second-rate power, and even the improvement during Putin’s tenure has not dramatically changed the situation. Even in the best case scenario, Russia will never be a major global center, the role it played in the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries and especially during the postwar Soviet era. Corruption and crass materialism also almost completely eradicated the Russian man or woman as a role model.

While Russia is in the process of geopolitical decay and there are serious problems for the very existence of its civilization, the situation with the Muslim community of the various ethnic groups in the Russian Federation is much different. It was able to withstand the shock-wave of changes much better, and at the present has felt the rising assertiveness of the global Muslim community. All this has led not to increasing assimilation but to the opposite. Ethnic minorities who had a weak sense of national/religious identity in the Soviet period have solidified a sense of separate identity that in many ways became opposite to that of the Russians.

These new trends have led to several new models of relationships between Russians and Muslim minorities in the Federation. And they have also led to possible tensions between ethnic Russians and Muslim minorities, with serious implications for the Russian state and also—due to Russia’s still enormous size—for all of Eurasia.

Muslim Programs in Dealing with the Russians

Muslims have included various ethnic groups, and it is not accidental that the resurrection of interest in Islam has often merged with rising ethnic nationalism, with a program of either complete independence from Moscow or at least, minimization of the groups’ (e.g., Tatars) dependence on Moscow. The ideology of these groups requires special study; our work is focused on another set of groups and ideologies.

The proponents of these ideologies do not spread the idea of nationality/ethnicity or of the dissolution of the Russian Federation. In fact, they vehemently discard nationalism as a dangerous idea that could just separate Muslims from each other. It is not race/ethnicity but common beliefs that unite or separate people. In a way, these Muslims anathematize nationalism in the same way as did orthodox Marxists, who proclaimed that the “proletariat has no Motherland” and should be united in the common struggle against the common capitalist enemy. Similar to orthodox Marxists, these ideologists do not preach separation of Muslims along national lines. They argue that all Muslims should be united regardless of their ethnic origin, and that the power relationship in Russia should be changed so that Rus-

sian Muslims get a larger share. Here several models emerge. One implication is that Muslims should not be the “younger brother” of Russians but an equal partner. Another is that Muslims should be the leading group in Russia, the “older brother.” Finally, there are those who believe that Russia should be totally Islamized.

Muslims as Equal Brothers

The model in which Muslims have moved from “younger brother” to equality with Russians has been elaborated on by Niazov Abdal-Wahed (Medvedev), the ethnic Russian who in 2001 created the “Eurasia Party.” Niazov definitely regarded Russians as only equal to Muslims, and his political project called for a redistribution of power, so Russians would lose some of their power to Muslims. The implementation of Niazov’s plan would lead to changes not only in Russia’s power structure but also in its geopolitical arrangements. For Niazov the Muslim countries are the major allies, and it is not surprising that his party is funded by foreign Muslim sources.

Muslims as Older Brothers

Geydar (Geidar) Dzhemal, chairman of the Muslim Committee, has provided a new model in which Russians are relegated to the position of “younger brother.” In Dzhemal’s view, the position of Russian Muslims is deeply connected with the global process, and the vision of this process is controversial enough. On the one hand, some of Dzhemal’s schemes imply that Russia is marginalized and that the global battle is going to be between Europe and the United States. Russia is to be just the object of global manipulation.

Another scheme implies an active role for Russia in global affairs. This could be done only if Russian Muslims took the lead. Elaborating on this model, Dzhemal pointed out that Russian/Eurasian civilization has peculiar features. Dzhemal embraced, at least implicitly, the Slavophile notion about the “Russian idea”—the great messianic drive to create a global society of brotherhood.

It was these features of the Russian/Eurasian civilization, Dzhemal argues, that led to the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet regime. This element constituted the core of Russian/Eurasian civilization for centuries, but it was destroyed by the cataclysmic changes that befell the country after Gorbachev’s reforms. Western values of crass materialism are incompatible with wholesome Russian messianic collectivism, and the

attempt to introduce them to Russia led to the collapse of Russian civilization. While Russian/Eurasian civilization is dying, Dzhemal implies, the centuries-old Russian civilization with its Russian idea—the quest for global justice that spurred the Bolshevik Revolution with its global implications—does not die. It has just been picked up by the global Muslim community, and the present global jihadist movement is nothing but a manifestation of the worldwide revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century. Russian Muslims should play the leading role in this global jihad. And they should help the healthy elements in Russian society, including ethnic Russians, in this quest for global justice.

Islamization of Russia

This model of development evolved during the Chechen resistance. During almost 15 years of resistance against the Russian authorities—in fact, from long before the official eruption of the first Chechen War—Chechens have undergone serious changes. One was the transformation of what seems to be a considerable part of the Chechen resistance from nationalists who fought for the independence of Chechnya into jihadists who regard resistance as a part of the drive for global Khalifah. This part of the Chechen resistance vehemently denies the notion of Chechens, or implicitly of any kind of nationalism of the Muslim people of Russia who dream about the creation of an independent/semi-independent state.

They referred to the dreams, for example, of the Tatar elite, who plan not only to maintain Tatarstan’s special position inside the Russian Federation but also to create a loose federation with Moscow or even complete separation. Moreover, those Tatar intellectuals also profess the theory of “Euro/Islam,” which emphasizes that truly understood values of Islam do not contradict the values of the modern West. Thus, in the view of these intellectuals, independent Muslim Tatarstan could well be integrated into the European Commonwealth. In fact, they believe that Westernized Tatarstans—truly imbued with European values of tolerance and democracy—would have more chance than Russians of acceptance as peers by Europeans.

Those who follow jihadism have regarded this nationalistic trend as harmful, for it would lead to the re-creation of the morally/politically bankrupt societies of the non-Muslim world. In the view of jihadists, nothing can be salvaged from present-day Russia—here

jihadists are different from Dzhemal—for Russian civilization was rotten from the start. Russia can be transformed only if Russians are Islamized. This Islamization should be the path of all ethnic groups in Russia, in fact, of all people on the earth.

All these models have implied direct or indirect redistribution of power in Russia and substantial if not radical changes in Russia's political arrangements. This could hardly please the Russian elite, mostly consisting of Russians or Russified members of Russia's minorities, e.g., Russian Jews. And, in order to understand the possible scenarios caused by the assertiveness of the Russian Muslim community, one should review the Russian, especially the elite, approach to the problems of the rising assertiveness of the Muslims in the Federation and on the global scale.

Eurasianism

The Russian elite has designed various models of the relationship between the Russian state, Russians in general, and the Muslim minorities of the empire for a long time, in reality since the beginning of modern Russian history. Those who assume that Russia should follow the footsteps of the West looked at the Muslim minorities as most of European elite of that time looked at colonial peoples: their goal was to civilize them. Westernizers have always assumed that Russia was more backward than the European countries of the West. Still, Russia was much closer to European civilization than to any Asian countries. Ethnic Russians, Orthodox by faith, belonged to the broad Christian civilization—basically equated with European civilization—and had a civilizing Westernizing mission toward Muslims of the empire who belonged to various ethnic groups. Here, the Russians' position was essentially the same as that of the French or British who engaged in "civilizing" and, in conjunction, Christianizing the "children," if one remembers Rudyard Kipling's definition of the subjects of Britain's colonial domain.

Slavophiles, those who believed in idiosyncratic differences of the Russian (actually, Slavic) civilization from that of the West, assumed that Russians should treat the Muslim minorities in a benign way. In this

respect, the Russian state was juxtaposed to exploitive European empires and regarded the Muslim minorities as the "children" of the grand Russian family state. Slavophilism had several modifications. One emphasized the harshness and power of the Russian empire. As predominately a state of ethnic Russians, Orthodox in their faith, the state would harshly suppress rebellious minorities. The stress here was on awe and fear. A more liberal version of Slavophilism emphasized what Slavophiles call *sobornost*, a spiritualized sense of collectivity, which they assumed belongs to all Slavs, especially Orthodox Slavs. The notion of *sobornost* implied that Muslims could be converted to Orthodox Christianity, but it would take a long time, and any coercion should be excluded from the plan. At present, Muslim "children" of the empire should live unmolested under the benign rule of the Orthodox tsar—the little father of all his subjects.

The emergence of the Soviet regime required new ideological trappings of the political arrangements between ethnic Slavs—mostly Russians—and many non-Slavic minorities, quite a few of them historically Muslim. A new model of relationship between Russians and Muslim minorities was proposed by Eurasianism.

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émigré community in the 1920s, Eurasianism in many ways ideologically institutionalized the relationships between the ethnic groups in the USSR and early Soviet foreign policy. Eurasianists proclaimed that it was not the Slavs outside the borders of Soviet Russia but various minorities, mostly Muslims of Turkic origin, that were the essential allies of Russia. Moreover, Eurasianists proclaimed that although Orthodox Russians were the leading group in Russia/USSR/Eurasia, the ethnic minorities, mostly Turkic Muslims, could not be regarded as voiceless subjects of the Russian elite. From this perspective, Eurasianists were quite different from the Slavophiles of pre-revolutionary Russia. Slavophiles, even in their liberal version, the Muslim minority of the empire, were at best "children" whose views were not taken into account. For Eurasianists the situation was different. In the new arrangements inside

the USSR, Russians, while retaining the leading role, elevated Muslim minorities to the level of “younger brothers” who participated in the arrangements of the states, and whose ethnic and religious identity was confirmed.

Eurasianists also proclaimed that, although Russia/Eurasia was not Asia, its people had more in common with Asians rather than with Europeans. Eurasianism actually has been an informal voice for Soviet ideologists in the sense that Eurasianists repeated what was proclaimed in the USSR, that the Soviet people were “a new historical unity” in which Russians played the role of major ethnic/cultural and political force.

Even though Eurasianists actually vocalized the statements of Soviet ideologists, historical Eurasianism was not much known during the Soviet period, but in post-Soviet Russia it became quite a popular ideological trend. It provided an alternative to the soon discredited Westernism, especially in its American reading, which had dominated Russia’s elite at the beginning of the post-Soviet era. Eurasianism provided the justification for the country’s penchant for authoritarianism, for a corporate and, in many ways, criminalized economy, and—this was important—for Russia’s existence as a multi-ethnic empire. While starting to spread among the post-Soviet elite at the beginning of Yeltsin’s era or before, it became especially important during Putin’s tenure. Putin has fully understood the importance of ethnic peace among Russians and non-Russian, mostly Muslim, people of various ethnic origins, and in his dealing with interethnic relationships he has in general followed the Eurasian paradigm, which emphasizes a healthy symbiosis between Russian and Muslim minorities.

Putin has demonstrated this unity between Russians and Muslims in various ways. For the 2006 state prize, Putin nominated both Patriarch Aleksei and a Tatar intellectual. In 2005, he was present at the millennial anniversary of Kazan, the capital of the Tatar republic. Putin pointed out that the city symbolized the mutually beneficial symbiosis of Russians and Tatars. Even historical events were interpreted in a Eurasian way. In 2005, Russians commemorated the anniversary of the Battle of Kulikovo in 1380, which had been traditionally seen as the first battle in Russian history where Russians defeated Mongols/Tatars. The battle was seen as the first step in Russia’s liberation from the Tatar yoke. Putin, however, provided a new interpretation of events. In Putin’s view, it was a battle not between Russians and Tatars but between two political forces,

each of which had both Tatars and Russians. Thus even the Kulikovo battle was an example of the cooperation between Russians and Tatars.

The modern variation of Eurasianism differs from traditional Eurasianism in its approach to Western Europe. Whereas in the 1920s-1930s Europe had been seen as alien/hostile to Russia/Eurasia, modern Eurasianists, for example, Alexander Dugin, the leading Russian Eurasianist, regard Western Europe, especially France and Germany, as natural allies, in fact, the natural extension of Russia/Eurasia. Still, despite this distancing from Asia and a sort of positive view toward the European heartland, Eurasianism—not just traditional historical Eurasianism but also its modern modification—sees in Asia one of the major points of gravitation of Russian foreign policy. Dugin, for example, regards Iran as one of Russia’s foremost allies, the cornerstone on which a great Eurasian empire should be built to confront Russia/Eurasia’s natural enemy: the United States. Putin’s rather benevolent approach to Iran can be seen as the manifestation of latent Eurasianism in foreign policy.

Eurasianism is thus the major ideological ingredient of Putin’s Russia and provides the ideological framework for coexistence between Russians and the Muslim, mostly Turkic, people of the Russian state. In fact, the latent Eurasianism here is a duplication of the Soviet notion of a “new historical community”—the Soviet people. In both cases, the role of Turkic/Muslim people in the ruling of the state was acknowledged; in all the paradigms, the Turkic/Muslim minority has not played the role of children of the Orthodox Russians. Yet they are relegated to the role of younger brothers vis-à-vis Russians. This arrangement started to be challenged by an increasing number of Muslim intellectuals who felt the rising power of the Muslim community. And they forged a new version of Eurasianism in which Russia’s leading role is challenged. Some of them, the radical Islamists, for example, reject not only the leading role of ethnic Russians and their Orthodox faith, but the very existence of a Russian- and consequently Orthodox-centered civilization of Northern Eurasia. This sort of ideology and political design has found strong opposition on the part of Russian nationalists who increased their influence during Putin’s tenure.

Eurasianism to Russian Nationalism

Russian-centered Eurasianism, with its implications of Russian symbiosis with the various Muslim peoples

of the Federation, has constituted the official, or at least semi-official, line of the Putin regime. This, however, is a rather weak ideological layer under which there is a much stronger streak of imperial Russian nationalism, apparently supported by a considerable part of the Russian elite, including those who hold power. This can be seen by the fact that Russian nationalism can be found on Russian TV screens and radio waves—both outlets tightly controlled by the present regime. The rise of Russian imperial nationalism has solidified its position due to the changes in Putin's Russia. Upon Putin's ascent to power, the central authorities increased their power. By 2004, Putin had not only struck a serious blow against the political aspirations of the major "oligarchs"—the tycoons who amassed enormous fortunes and wanted to rule Russia directly during the Yeltsin era—but abolished the election of the governors. This increased centralization has coincided with the country's continuous economic growth, mostly caused by windfall oil and gas revenues. All these aspects of Putin's Russia are well known.

There is another aspect of Putin's regime that has not received much attention. It is the continuous rise of the middle class and what Norbert Elias called the "civilizational process," as the behavior and modus operandi of increasing numbers of Russian middle-class members become hardly different from those of Westerners. This process has affected the mentality of the Russian elite and a considerable part of the Russian middle class and helped to shape Russian imperial nationalism. Those who have visited Russia recently, especially Moscow and St. Petersburg, could detect increasing elements of "normality" that have become not just a façade—as in the early post-Soviet era—but, indeed, an essential aspect of life. While fraud and disrespect for the formal aspect of the laws continue to be widespread, they are not as pervasive as before, and formal, contractual obligations have started to be accepted by an increasing part of the Russian population. There is also much more respect for family, and prostitution has declined in popularity, in sharp contrast to the early post-Soviet period when it was one of the most desirable professions. The fact is that how Russians dress and behave has become more and more similar to the West.

One, of course, could argue as to the degree of these changes and their chance of continuation, as well as their overall importance and context. Still, they are here, and one could state that a modern Russia in the

capitalist legalistic framework has started to slowly emerge, under the umbrella of the strong authoritarian state. One might remember that modern capitalism and the sense of citizenship also emerged in early modern Europe under the umbrella of strong government. One should also remember that the rise of capitalism and the sense of citizenship implied a rise of what could be seen as positive features: an increased sense of responsibility, not just to friends and kin—as in the Soviet era, which in many ways had features similar to pre-modern or non-Western societies—but also to the broader community and to the nation.

At the same time, nationalism in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe led to the development of racism. From the perspective of growing Russian nationalism, this also can be expected. In fact, racism is often the other side of the advent of capitalist modernization and the entrenchment of Western "normality."

While discussing the development of Russian nationalism, one should remember that modern Russian nationalism has its idiosyncratic features. Some of these harken back to the early post-Soviet period. Most notable is that this new Russian nationalism has absorbed the anti-Americanism of the "Red to Brown" opposition of that era. Anti-Americanism has become rampant. TV news regularly reports on American problems in Iraq, and it is implied that the United States has bogged down in Iraq. Mikhail Leont'ev, the popular TV political commentator, has presented the United States as a neurotic irrational power that plans to engage in a long series of wars to impose democracy in its American reading with no inkling of the consequences for the globe. It is not surprising, Leont'ev and other commentators imply, that the people of the world have started to arm themselves in order to protect themselves from the dangerous "cowboy" whose policies could lead to disaster for the world and ultimately for himself.

While the United States is presented as pathologically aggressive, Russia is seen as a power that can stand for itself. This assertiveness is manifested, for example, in a sort of revival for Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Following his phenomenal success in the early 1990s when he captured almost 25 percent of the electoral votes in the Duma, after several scandalous statements and actions, he was seen as a spent force, a sort of court jester, and his book, in which he proposed re-creation of the grand Russian empire stretching to the Indian Ocean, was seen as one of the last shrieks of a dying Russian/Soviet imperial messianism.

Recently, Zhirinovsky, who proclaimed that Russia is a mighty state that could well defend itself from the United States, has enjoyed increasing support. The very fact that he has access to TV demonstrates that his views are shared by a considerable number of the ruling elite. This virulent anti-Americanism seems to have made this new Russian imperialism quite similar to the “Red to Brown” ideology of the Yeltsin era. But this is not the case. The reason is that this virulent anti-Americanism has combined with equally passionate philo-Europeanism.

Dmitry Medvedev, one of Putin’s deputies and, one assumes, a potential successor, has proclaimed publicly that Russia is a European power and any future Russian president should remember it. Russian TV often blasts NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) but never elaborates on the European countries that are the members of the organization. As a matter of fact, Germany, France, and the UK, if mentioned on TV, are invariably presented positively. The prestige of Europe at the expense of the United States has been reinforced by the steady decline of the U.S. dollar versus both the Russian ruble and the Euro. But more than this, the passion for Europe has been manifested by the daily life of Russians in the big cities. The goods in the stores, the advertisements in English and French, and always the appeal to the “European standard” indicate the passionate desire of the Russian elite and an increasing number of the Russian middle class to be a part of Europe, of the West in general, who should acknowledge that Russia, is just the eastern part of European civilization.

Viewing Russia as basically a European power, these representatives of Russian imperial nationalism have no desire to regard Muslim minorities of the empire as even younger brothers or share with them power in any way. In most cases, these Muslim minorities are benignly ignored. Images related to Orthodoxy are quite common on Russian TV, but images of Muslims and Islam are quite rare or seen in the framework of curious Orientalism. This was the case with Chechnya: on Russian TV Chechnya emerged as a peaceful place with a few insurgents who are nothing but foreign mercenaries. This generally peaceful Chechnya was populated by exotic people with boundless sexual drive, and this explains the spread of polygamy and the equal passion for martial arts.

The imperial nationalists proclaimed that benign, mighty Russia—basically the state of ethnic Russians—allows ethnic minorities, including Russian

Muslims of various ethnic origins, to live in peace. But they should always remember their place. Russian nationalist-minded intellectuals state publicly that the government of the Russian Federation should remember that its major concern should be not for abstract citizens of the Federation but for ethnic Russians.

This sort of rebuke to the Federation government can be seen in response to Putin’s plan to increase the birth rate to prevent continuous Russian depopulation. One of the columnists of *Izvestia* has stated that Putin’s plan is badly designed. The authors of the plan, he says, do not understand that the plan must target not Russia’s citizens in general but ethnic Russians. Otherwise, Muslims and similar groups would take advantage of incentives and this would hardly benefit the Russian state.

Not only Russian nationalists but even Eurasians who appreciate Muslim minorities much more than do nationalists cannot accept the idea of Russians sharing power with Muslim minorities on an equal footing. When Medvedev (Niazov) created his “Eurasian” Party, with the program emphasizing Russians sharing power with Muslim minorities, it led to an uproar among Dugin Eurasianists. Dugin vehemently protested the use of the word “Eurasia” in the title of the party and was quite hostile to Niazov’s organization in general. There was, of course, a great deal of personal acrimony in Dugin’s approach to Niazov’s party, but, there is also a different cause for discord. For Dugin, Orthodox Russia is to be the leading force in Russia/Eurasia, albeit he is not always consistent in his assumption (he has indicated that Eurasian Muslims, that is, the Muslims of the Federation, could well play a much more important role in the future). Niazov was convinced that power sharing should be implemented immediately and that Muslim countries of the Middle East should be Russia’s major partners; Europe, including Germany and France, should be marginalized in geopolitical arrangements. This could not please Dugin-type Eurasianists or, even more, Russian nationalists who, regardless of political hues, see Russia as much closer to Europe than to any region of Asia. This basic European orientation of Russian imperial nationalism implied not only skeptical views of Muslims inside the Federation but also a rather cautious approach to the Muslim countries of what Russians call “distant abroad.”

This sort of cautious approach to the Muslim countries can be seen in Russia’s dealing with Iran.

Not just “Eurasianists” but European-oriented Rus-

sian nationalists in general can easily find the benefit of dealing with Iran. Iran is not only one of the major customers of Russian high technology, including weapons, but also vehemently anti-American; the latter should, of course, please Russian nationalists with their paranoid anti-Americanism. Still, in the minds of some Russians too close a relationship with Iran could have quite a few negative repercussions. Such a relationship could not only suck Russia into direct confrontation with the United States—not in the plans of the Russian elite, regardless of all the vituperation against the United States—but also increase the assertiveness of the Muslim minorities inside Russia. And this hardly could please Russian nationalists. This defines the nature of the Russian elite's flirtation with Iran. This is seen not as a sign of a possible alliance, not as a goal in itself, but plainly as a bargaining chip in dealing with the West. There are positive mentions of Iran on radio and TV, but they are often intermingled with critical comments. Moreover, on one of Leont'ev's TV shows he blasted Bush as an irrational fanatic but made the same comments in regard to Ahmadinejad and stated that if Iran proceeded in its extremist policy, it would lose Russia, its only true friend.

Russian imperial nationalism emerged as the result of the solidification of the Russian states, economic success, and the rise of the middle class. Its representatives have free rein to expose their views on TV. One can assume that it plays the role of a "reserve" ideology—the ideological alternative if the current European-oriented reading of Eurasianism were to fail. Imperial Russian nationalism, while implying the use of force in problems with ethnic minorities, including those who profess Islam, still has room for compromise with minorities. As was the case with Slavophiles of the late nineteenth century, present-day Russian nationalists proclaim that minorities can live under the umbrella of the great Russian people, and while these minorities, including Muslims, would not share power with Orthodox Russians, they could exercise their cultural/religious rights unmolested.

As was the case with Slavophiles of the late nineteenth century, present-day Russian nationalists proclaim that minorities can live under the umbrella of the great Russian people, and while these minorities, including Muslims, would not share power with Orthodox Russians, they could exercise their cultural/religious rights unmolested.

The story is different from that of extremist Russian nationalism. These ideological and consequently political arrangements imply the following: (1) Russian extremist nationalism implies the direct confrontation with ethnic minorities, especially Muslim; (2) the authorities regard extremist nationalism as a direct threat to the regime and the state. Despite the ideological connection between imperial and extremist nationalism, authorities regard the latter as the ideology of the opposition and a dangerous ideological trend that could potentially be detrimental to the very stability of the

Russian Federation.

The rising extremist nationalism has a social framework quite different from that of imperial Russian nationalism. While some members of the Russian middle class solidified their position, other segments of society moved down the social ladder. The downtrodden and marginal elements have a very weak sense of social solidarity and a class animus, which fueled the European revolutions in the nineteenth century and, to some extent, the Russian revolutions of 1905-1921. At the same time, they have many contacts with

the Muslim minorities who populate the local markets. It is not the rich as a social group but ethnic minorities who are seen as the major source of problems. It is clear that these groups of Russian extremists have put forward the idea of "Russia for Russians." This vision of the Russian state as a state of ethnic Russians is implicitly directed against all minorities of the Russian Federation, but it is the Muslim minorities of the Federation that have become the major target of these groups.

The political program of these groups in dealing with Muslim minorities is as follows. These minorities should be expelled from Russian cities, and, if possible, ethnic Russians should reassert their power in the ethnic enclaves. If this is impossible, Russia should abandon these territories, for maintaining control would waste Russian resources and subsidize these enclaves. In the context of this philosophy, an extreme option would be that Russians should opt for a "Republic of

Russia.” This scenario would imply that Russia would shrink farther, possibly to the confines of the sixteenth century. But most important here in the view of these extremists is not the territorial range but the ethnic purity of the Russian state. Similar to imperial nationalists, extremist nationalists are not anti-European or even anti-American. They regard Europeans and even Americans as fellow whites who should be united to fight the common threat. They are especially fond of European right-wing and neo-fascist groups and are willing to establish connections with them or, at least, take on their symbols.

There are several groups that could fall into this category. The Movement Against Illegal Emigration is one of the most influential among them and actively participated in the November 4, 2006 parade; “November 4” has replaced the celebration of the Bolshevik Revolution on November 7. Another group, Russian National Unity (RNE), also seems to be experiencing a sort of rise in popularity, at least judging by numerous graffiti in support or against RNE, which I saw traveling from Ekaterinburg (Urals) to Moscow. There are also numerous skinhead groups. They are best known for pogroms against mostly dark-skinned minorities and foreigners. They also beat up dark-skinned foreign students and decorate the walls of Russian cities with graffiti.

Repercussions

Under the late Yeltsin, and now, especially Putin, Russia has experienced two different trends. On one hand, there is the increasing assertiveness of the Russian state and middle class, who assume that ethnic Russia and Orthodox religion should dominate the Russian state. The emergence of various new forms of Russian imperial nationalism has led to a controversial, one might say, “psychotic,” relationship with the West. While anxious to be accepted by the West, specifically Western Europe, Russians at the same time assert their importance and their hostility to NATO and the United States. At the same time, one can see increasing numbers of Russian Muslims, mostly of Turkic origin, who are not so prone to assimilation as before and demand to share power with ethnic Russians.

The Russian state has engaged in several programs to change the situation. One design implied bringing more ethnic Russians from the republics of the former USSR. Similar plans implied repopulating the Far East; here, of course, the plan was designed to confront real or imaginary Chinese ethnic expansion. Yet, with pervasive corruption, the Russian state could hardly engage in the long run in policies that would change the ethnic balance of the state. Some of the recent measures—the attempt to boost the birth rate—would in fact increase the number of Muslims in Russia; in any case, there is a steady increase of Muslims in Russia.

While the sameness of religion and ethnicity would not necessarily lead to a change of geopolitical emphasis, the Muslimization/Turkization of Russia could foster Russia’s increasing gravitation to the Muslim region (e.g., Iran), especially if Russia were increasingly frustrated in its dealing with the West. This demographic and geopolitical shift would be the result of a process that would take a lot of time. There is, however, another problem, caused by the rise of the Russian extremists, which reinforces the rise of the militant jihadists in Chechnya and the Caucasus in general. It also has the potential to spread in other parts of Russia, like Tatarstan, that could be testified to by the wave of arrests of people accused of Islamic extremism. Besides encouraging Islamic extremism and terrorism, Russian extremism and direct violence against Muslim minorities can reinforce the separatist feelings among the regions dominated by Islamic people. This push for loosening the Russian Federation could be seen as a far-fetched scenario at a time when Putin has increased his power and the centralizing power of the state, and has prepared for the smooth transition of his successor. Yet in the case of a crisis/serious problem, the semi-disintegration/disintegration scenario would be a possibility.

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